

# NUKU-PU‘U

(*Hemignathus lucidus*)

The Hawaiian name, Nuku-pu‘u, describes the curved bill of this rare honeycreeper. “Nuku” is the bill of a bird, and “pu‘u” is a small round hill.

**DISTRIBUTION:** Nuku-pu‘u are found near the Wainiha Pall in the Alaka‘i Swamp of Kaua‘i. On Maui they dwell in wet ‘ōhi‘a and koa-‘ōhi‘a forests on the northeast slopes of Haleakalā and in Kipahulu Valley from about 4,750 to 6,400 feet elevation.

**DESCRIPTION:** The distinctive bill is long and decurved; the upper mandible is twice as long as the lower. The male is grayish olive-green above (Maui), yellow olive-green above (Kaua‘i), with a bright yellow head, throat, and breast. Length is 4.5 to 5.5 inches. Females are smaller and not as brightly colored as males.

**VOICE:** The call is a clear “kee-wit;” the song is a short, loud trill.

**NESTING:** Breeding biology is unknown.

**DIET:** Nuku-pu‘u make a tapping sound while hammering on branches to find wood-boring beetles and moth larvae. They also feed on spiders found in lichen-covered branches, and on nectar from ‘ōhi‘a and lobelia flowers.

**CONSERVATION NOTE:** The Maui subspecies, has not been sighted in a number of years as is likely extinct. The population of Nuku-pu‘u on Kaua‘i, where the last sighting was in 1985, is presumed to be very small. The O‘ahu race is believed to be extinct.

Evidence suggests that Nuku-pu‘u were originally more common in koa rather than ‘ōhi‘a forests due to the greater number of insect borers found in koa wood. Prior to the clearing of lowland forests on Kaua‘i, Nuku-pu‘u were associated with koa forests as low as 2,000 feet in elevation. On Maui, cattle ranching and feral cattle have eliminated most dryland forest habitat up to 5,000 feet elevation. As a result, only a small fragment of the original Nuku-pu‘u population remains in the ‘ōhi‘a forest.

The browsing activities of goats and the rooting of pigs continue to disrupt remaining habitat. The goat population on the south slopes of Haleakalā numbers about ten thousand. Control of these herds and a growing goat population on Kaua‘i, poses a tremendous challenge to biologists concerned with managing this habitat for endangered forest birds. A cooperative effort to control feral animals on Maui has been initiated by federal, state and private agencies proposing fence construction around essential habitat. These efforts, and measures to help control introduced plants and reduce breeding sites of disease-transmitting mosquitoes, are critical to the survival of this critically endangered and beautiful bird.



Only a few Nukupu‘u survive on Kaua‘i and Maui.

—Painting by Sheryl Ives Boynton